

ADDRESS

BY HON. S. S. HAYES,

AT THE

ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME, IND.,

JUNE 24th, 1874.

CHICAGO:

J. S. THOMPSON & Co., PRINTERS, 158 AND 160 S. CLARK ST.

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BY HON. S. S. HAYES,
discussed, at Chicago, Jan'y 31. 1880

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MR. PRESIDENT AND LADIES AND GENTLEMEN :

When I accepted the invitation to make some remarks on this occasion I did not understand that I would be set down on the programme for an oration.

A composition so elaborate, so perfect in style and design, so rich with the graces of rhetoric as to be worthy to be called an oration, I have neither the leisure nor the ability to produce. Even if qualified to make the attempt, I should hesitate, in the presence of this assembly, these learned professors, and these young gentlemen, fresh from the classics and familiar with the best models of ancient and modern times.

With your permission I shall only offer a few practical observations to that portion of my audience who, having spent some happy years amidst these pleasant scenes in the education of their faculties and the acquisition of knowledge, under the guidance of these eminent and skillful teachers, are about to enter upon a new phase of life, with which at present they are but little acquainted.

If I can aid them to start aright upon this voyage, to provide themselves with the means of self-preservation, to weather the storms

which will beset them, and to follow a course which will lead them to true prosperity and happiness, I shall deem myself fortunate.

The wise man who undertakes anything new, begins by a careful survey of the situation. He decides first that the object is right and of sufficient importance: second, that it is capable of accomplishment by him. He examines himself, the obstacles in his way, and the means at his command. Having learned fully the requirements of the case, he proceeds with courage and industry until his exertions are rewarded with success. If perchance he has erred in his calculations, or, from any cause, is defeated, he bears his disappointment with patience and turns with the same courage and industry to the next duty or enterprise which may present itself before him.

This is the robust habit of mind which belongs to all who attain eminence in any of the walks of life or accomplish great results of any kind. It is a combination of foresight, courage, industry and patience. If you do not already possess it, you should never rest satisfied until you have attained it.

It is of equal importance to avoid in early life entanglements of every kind. These may arise from unworthy companionships, bad associations, sensual and selfish indulgences, indolent or extravagant habits, and false views of our situation, of the ends of our existence and the proper objects of ambition.

Because we have found healthful amusement in athletic exercises it does not follow that our associates should be chosen from those who follow such exercises for a livelihood, or that we should seek them at the billiard saloon, the race course, the base ball club, or the circus.

Evil communications, vulgar and indecent language, the vices of sensualism, and all acts prompted by the baser passions of our nature will be shunned by every young man who respects himself or desires the respect of others. Better still for him if in addition

he has erected for himself a high standard of excellence. if he has acquired a taste for the pure, the beautiful and the good ; if he has learned to love and practice virtue for its own sake.

I would also impress upon him the value of habits of self-control and self-denial, which indeed are included in the practice of virtue. If perfectly able to deny himself every gratification, every object of his wishes which his judgment or his conscience disapproves, he is master of himself, and prepared for that measure of success to which his other qualities may entitle him.

Let us suppose now that the young graduate is prepared to start in the world with a good education, a good reputation, and the qualifications and purposes I have just described. The first question which he has to meet, is the choice of a vocation. To solve this question properly, he must begin with a just idea of the requirements of his situation in life, and of his obligations to those who have nurtured and educated him.

It is often objected to the indiscriminate education of all classes that tastes and desires are created, which are incompatible with the circumstances in which the majority are placed. I do not think this effect is often produced in minds of a superior order. The grand brotherhood of genius and learning is a true democracy. It is made up from all ranks and conditions. Its patents of nobility come from God, before whom the beggar and the king are equal. Its members care little for artificial distinctions, for the trifles worshipped by the frivolous and weak. Their companionship is with great facts, and principles, and ideas. To labor and to endure is their pleasure. A lower order of minds may obtain from a college course but a smattering of knowledge and a few external accomplishments, with a distaste for physical labor. With even these it is probable that in most cases experience and necessity prove efficient correctives.

However, it is true that much disappointment and unhappiness result from mistakes made in the choice of a vocation, arising

mostly from the foolish notion that the educated man should not support himself by manual labor. If this notion should prevail, when education becomes universal, manual labor and production will cease, the means of subsistence will fail, and the earth become depopulated. Erroneous as it is, and kept in check by the common sense of the community, it has caused the professions and the lighter employments to be overcrowded, in defiance of the law of supply and demand, and to the lasting sorrow of thousands of our promising youth, who might be profitably employed in the different trades and agriculture.

I wish I could impress it on the minds of all our young men, that the capacity to perform manual labor is the first step towards independence. Frugality and industry are its attendants. Contentment and a competency are its reward.

Of all the different employments, agriculture is one of the most innocent, the most agreeable, the most remunerative, and the most dignified.

The honest and industrious young farmer knows the value of economy and simplicity of life. If he marries in his own class a sensible and industrious woman, his prospect of happiness and success is much better than it would have been had he studied a profession, or sought a clerkship, to wait the better part of his life before he could realize any return. But the farmer should be careful that the demon of avarice does not possess him, and lead him to break down his own health and that of his family by overwork from excessive haste to get rich.

This leads me to remark that our country suffers under two evils that have almost become national. One is extravagance, the other a craving for wealth.

It seems almost peculiar to the American character to be discontented with the present, to waste our substance in folly, and long wistfully for some lucky stroke to place us in possession of the

means of further indulgence and ostentation. It is to be hoped that the sharp teachings of adversity will correct the faults of our disposition, and leave us to develop prudently and use wisely the abundant resources with which our land is favored.

Youth is the season of hope and enthusiasm. The future is painted in glowing colors. The imagination is filled with pictures of varied scenes of enjoyment or activity.

One sees before him all the pleasures of the senses.

Another, visions of wealth and power.

Another, the pomp and circumstance of war, the honors of the successful soldier.

Another is surrounded in fancy by listening senates, triumphs in the forum, or from the hustings gathers the plaudits of admiring thousands, while displaying the talents and skill with which he believes himself endowed.

The voice of self-indulgence, of vanity, of ambition, is heard calling the eager youth, and urging him forward. But of all who enter life each year, full of hope and expectation, how few attain the object of their desires, and how many even of these are disappointed with the result.

What are the causes of this failure and disappointment?

How can we guard against them?

I imagine they are owing mainly to the fact that the plan of life has not been formed with sufficient care, or with a full understanding of the value of things and the requirements and possibilities of the situation.

Pleasure is not an object worthy of pursuit. It is only a gratification intended to lighten our cares, and refresh us after our labors. He who makes it his chief aim disgraces his manhood and insures his future misery.

Wealth, and power, and station, and popularity, and the applause of the many are likewise low objects of desire, seldom attained, and unsatisfying to those who have them.

I would say to the young man, seek none of these things. What then can he do to insure his happiness? I answer, learn wisdom. Know yourself and the true value of things, and seek those objects that are within reach, and have a value sufficient to justify and reward their pursuit.

As to pleasure, the moderate exercise of our faculties is a source of real pleasure within the reach of all. Let us open our eyes and ears and enjoy the beauties of nature. The green grass, the waving grain, the spreading trees, the sparkling waters, the singing birds, and the myriads of pleasing and sublime sights and sounds which nature presents for our entertainment, are likewise within the reach of all, and are infinitely superior in all the elements of enjoyment to the glare and glitter, and noise of artificial and costly pleasures.

Then, as to the pursuit of wealth and power, the ambition for ownership and command. I will here tell you something which perhaps will surprise you. It may seem to you a paradox. Nevertheless it is true. The more you have, of material things, the greater your power among men, the less complete is your ownership, and your independence. Humility is the lesson which experience teaches us. A few revolving seasons reduces the domain of the most wealthy to the narrow space covered by his coffin. And while in the plentitude of wealth and power, his enjoyment is imaginary, his labors and cares are real.

The most valuable of all possessions, each human being has, that is his own soul. That is a possession also capable of being infinitely expanded in value by its cultivation, or it may be marred and ruined by neglect and abuse.

Let every young man enter upon life with the consciousness that he is the owner of that treasure, a treasure beyond all price, of which nothing but his own misconduct can deprive him, and to which but little if anything can be added by extraneous acquisitions. Let

him strive to preserve and improve this treasure by exerting its best and noblest faculties, filling it with knowledge and wisdom, and preparing it for a destiny grand beyond conception, and endless as eternity.

Again, the rewards of gratified vanity, whether of the soldier or the public man, are transient, I may say momentary. The breath of the summer wind is not more fleeting than the breath of popular favor. If fame is the only reward of the soldier or statesman, he is most illy paid. If beyond this he has not the consciousness of duty done, of toil and sacrifice in defense of the right, in promoting the welfare of his fellow men, his life has been a waste.

These public employments are to be filled by those who are called to them. They should be understood to be uncertain in their tenure, of little value in themselves, and most deceptive to those who are led to surrender their time and stake their hopes and happiness upon their attainment.

Office-seeking is not in itself, perhaps, degrading. It is possible that a person may be a professional office-seeker and yet be upright, correct in his habits, true to his word, faithful to his trusts. But it must be admitted that the temptations which attend this mode of life are strong and difficult to resist. The politician whose conscience is weak may enter upon his career with good intentions, but he is too apt to close it a social and moral wreck. What then is to become of these public employments, so necessary to the welfare of the state? Are they to be abandoned by the good men and left entirely to the bad? I trust not! Every neighborhood in the country is now suffering from bad legislation or bad administration. The tide of corruption has risen and spread over the land until its fetid waters have defiled even the most holy places. Reformation and purification must be had, if there is any virtue left among the people. I have no doubt there is virtue enough among the people

to accomplish these ends. It cannot be otherwise. I cannot believe that we have reached the stage of moral imbecility, the last stage in the existence of nations. So recent and bright a beginning cannot have an end so sudden and disastrous. The American republic, just risen like a sun in its glory, warming with its effulgence the weary and the worn, the oppressed and the suffering, of all lands, will not now vanish like a meteor and leave the pall of darkness over the hopes of mankind.

The work of reform cannot be carried out without the action of men of ability and integrity. Such men will be found. They will take part in it, not for their own sakes, but for the sake of others.

But because we have started in life to make our living in a sensible way, it does not follow that we are to abandon mental culture and the studies in which we have become proficient.

The human mind is wonderful in its capacities, and there is no reason why the laborer, the farmer, the mechanic, the tradesman, as well as the professional man, should allow his faculties to become torpid, or should forego the enlargement of his understanding and the extension and proper classification of his knowledge.

What I contend for is not the abandonment of liberal studies, but the enfranchisement of the student by making him independent in his circumstances, by demolishing the idols of vanity and folly, to which a perverted public taste invites him to offer incense. I would teach him the first lessons of true wisdom, by teaching him that all the mere accessories of life, are of comparatively small value, least of all wealth and display; that the essential thing is the man himself, with his qualities and affections, surrounding himself by good associations in whatever sphere he may move, and unfolding into a being fitted to enter worthily into a higher and better existence, and that this man may enjoy all the most precious things without money, and without price; and may prove his manhood in the realms of literature and science, without regard to the amount of his means and pecuniary resources.

You leave college with the habit of study. Is it necessary to lose it and to leave all literary pursuits, because you have entered upon the labors of life?

He who will devote one hour every day to judicious systematic study, and mental improvement, cannot fail in time to become wise and learned. In one hour the linguist can learn and master a number of the root words of the language he is studying, and obtain the definitions of many terms before unknown to him. In one hour the musician can master several of the relations of musical sounds—the painter and sculptor can obtain some new ideas of the relations of color, or form and distance. In one hour the mathematician can possess himself of one or more new and important theorems. In one hour the student of geography may learn the leading features of some important division of the earth, the student of history may get the key-stone fact of the development of one nation, or learn the cause of the downfall of another.

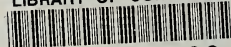
In fact there is scarcely a limit to the mental growth, learning and improvement which may be obtained by one hour's judicious study each day. To secure this benefit the student must avoid the piles of trash which litter the shelves of all libraries, and the ephemereal and demoralizing publications with which the press is teeming. Stick to your elementary works, your dictionaries, lexicons and encyclopedias, remembering at the same time that they are all imperfect. Let every thing read be read for a purpose, and with close attention, and under the surveillance of a sound judgment—and remember that we do not profit so much by what we read as by what we digest.

Having thus started in life, free from complications and embarrassments, with no moonstruck or will-of-the-wisp ambition, under the guidance of good principles, good feelings, good intentions, and force of character to resist improper pressure and bear the suffering and disappointment incident to humanity, the young man

can anticipate happiness and success, a useful and honorable career, alike whether he be laborer or capitalist, with only this difference, that the simpler and more humble his avocation, the fewer the hindrances in the march of improvement; the more the majesty of the man will loom up above the surroundings, and the more probable that at some future day, whether in the present or the after life, he will be installed high in the ranks of an aristocracy, not of birth or office, of wealth or of fashion, but of the just and true and wise of all races and of all times.

Gentlemen of the graduating class, you are now about to leave these halls of learning. Probably you will never again all meet here together. You will carry with you to your homes the best wishes of all connected with this excellent institution, for your health and welfare. I am sure you will endeavor, by your conduct, to prove that you have availed yourselves fully of the great advantages you have enjoyed, and wherever you may be, will preserve for your *alma mater* feelings of gratitude, affection and friendship.

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